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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MUTHARIKA THANKS USG FOR 44 YEARS OF
DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

1. SUMMARY: USAID celebrated 44 years of partnership with the people of Malawi in a day-long event on October 20 at the USAID Mission in Lilongwe. Nearly 600 invited guests toured booths representing 33 different projects under USAID's four strategic objectives: health, democracy and governance, education, and sustainable economic growth. In his first appearance at a bilateral event in Malawi since assuming office, President Bingu wa Mutharika thanked the USG for its investment in Malawi since 1960. He frankly stated his disappointment that Malawi did not qualify to participate in the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), acknowledging "shortcomings in our fiscal and financial management." Mutharika expressed hope, however, that his policies of combating corruption and improving accountability would make Malawi more competitive for MCA consideration in the future. Coverage of the USAID Anniversary in Malawi's national media was widespread, detailed and positive. The coverage focused primarily on USAID's current programs and on the long-term success of USAID's activities in Malawi--an investment totaling nearly USD two billion in current dollar terms.

Speeches

2. In the first address to a bilateral event in several years by a sitting Malawian president, President Mutharika thanked the United States for its long-term commitment to reduce poverty and foster democratic stability in Malawi. Mutharika reiterated his commitment to combat corruption, reform the public sector and spur economic growth. While noting disappointment that Malawi did not make the cut as a "threshold country" under the MCA, Mutharika urged the USG to favorably consider his good governance efforts in any future determination. President Mutharika commented that Malawi would need to maintain 6 percent annual growth rates in order to substantially lower poverty rates. Focusing on the importance of stimulating private-sector investment in order to promote economic growth, Mutharika promised "fundamental policy reforms" to reduce government interference in the private sector and requested continued donor support for anticorruption and poverty reduction efforts.

3. In his welcoming address, USAID Mission Director Roger Yochelson listed some of USAID's many achievements in Malawi, and praised Malawians for their energetic and sustained efforts as development partners. He underscored that while the people of the United States remain life-long partners, in the end it is only Malawians who can ensure sustainable improvements to their country. Looking to the future, the Mission Director called for greater effort in encouraging private-sector development as an engine for growth and development. Chargé d'Affaires Gilmour emphasized the continued long-term benefits of USAID development programs in Malawi. He mentioned specific benefits to Malawian citizens from USAID programs in education and human resource development, rural water development, HIV/AIDs awareness and testing, basic infrastructure projects like road construction, microcredit institutions and programs to educate the populace about their legal and constitutional rights. The Chargé confirmed the USG's long-term commitment to Malawi, saying it is U.S. policy to invest in countries "that care for the health and education of their people, respect freedom and the rule of law and unleash the power of the private sector--and particularly small businesses--to create jobs and drive economic growth."

Activities and Exhibits

14. USAID implementing partners set up displays in booths on the Mission grounds representing projects organized under USAID's four strategic objectives. The diversity of the projects represented by USAID's implementing partners reflected the wide reach of American assistance to Malawi. President Mutharika and seven government ministers inspected over half of the exhibits, television cameras in tow, providing an excellent opportunity for government officials and the media to focus on specific USAID activities.

15. One sustainable-agricultural project displayed three rows of corn plants that graphically demonstrated the results of three different growing regimens: no fertilizer, inadequately applied fertilizer and following a proper fertilizer regime. Health sector partners featured the life-saving work they do to combat malaria and HIV/AIDS and to promote child health, nutrition, and survival. Paralegals from Malawi Carer, an NGO dedicated to educating Malawians about their rights under the law, were able to explain their work to the President himself, something that later became part of television coverage of the event. One female member of parliament greeted the attendants at the International Republican Institute booth with affection and enthusiasm saying, "I won my seat because of the tips I learned in your training workshop!" Malawi's flagship educational institutions were also represented, showcasing USAID's key role in investing in education and human resource development.

And the Winner is.

16. The most charismatic project participants were, without question, two calves brought by Land of Lakes to exhibit its work in sustainable small-holder dairy farming. The calves provided color commentary throughout the day, including when the President inspected them with his retinue. Along with the rural woman accompanying them, they articulated an important economic message--by investing in a dairy cow and dedicating part of a quarter-hectare plot to maintaining it, a small-holder rural household can stimulate economic growth and diversification in the community, empower women, and promote health and nutrition.

Media Coverage

17. A joint USAID-Public Affairs media strategy successfully obtained positive--and ongoing--coverage of USG programs in Malawi. Mission Director Yochelson was the featured guest in a half-hour interview program on Television Malawi (TVM), Malawi's only television network. The program was broadcast on the eve of the event and allowed the Mission Director to speak directly to Malawians about USAID's activities, and more importantly, about why the USG has invested in Malawi's development during the past 44 years. Stories in national dailies, a radio interview on Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and the TVM program created strong media momentum before the event, focusing national attention on USAID's current and past programs and making the Anniversary a "hot ticket" for government officials and invited guests.

18. Public Affairs organized interviews during the event by TVM reporters with USAID's strategic objective team leaders and their implementing partners. These were edited into a ten-minute national news story about the Anniversary. Coverage on the day of the event included stories in major dailies and a broadcast of the President's speech in its entirety. Stories in most of Malawi's national and regional print media filtered out in the days following the event and continue to appear as of October 26. In an effort to reach the eighty-percent of Malawians who get their news from indigenous-language radio, Public Affairs organized a Chichewa language radio story with reporters from MBC and USAID's democracy and governance team leader. The story featured interviews with paralegals working to educate Malawians in a village near Dedza about their legal rights. Because the interviews were conducted in Chichewa, clients were able to tell how they benefited from this program directly to other Malawians.

19. Comment: The USAID Anniversary created the rare opportunity to focus national attention on the USG's development work in Malawi, and by all accounts was a

tremendous success. Because USAID does not provide direct budgetary support to the GOM, its work can tend to be undervalued by some ministers who do not feel that they benefit directly from USAID projects. President Mutharika's participation in the event, and the extensive media coverage of USAID projects, served as a healthy corrective to that perception. The President also broke with precedent in attending a purely bilateral event, lending real weight to the assertion that he desires to strengthen bilateral ties with the U.S.

GILMOUR